

Appendix B

Corridor Public Hearing Transcript and Comments

B. CORRIDOR PUBLIC HEARING TRANSCRIPT AND COMMENTS

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OFFICIAL PUBLIC HEARING TRANSCRIPT
Corridor Public Hearing for US 321 Improvements
Covering an area from Blackberry Road south of Blowing Rock
To Aho Road north of Blowing Rock
Blowing Rock Assembly Grounds
August 26, 2002
R-2237C

Good evening and I would like to welcome you to this evening's public hearing for the location for the improvements to US 321 covering an area from Blackberry Road up to Aho Road and areas in between. My name is Carl Goode, I'm manager of the Office of Human Environment for the Department of Transportation.

Before I continue, I would like to introduce to you some other people who are with us this evening representing various functions within the Department. First of all, I would like to introduce to you the Board of Transportation Member for this area Mr. Sam Irby.

Sam Irby: Thank you Carl. I'm Sam Irby and I represent the northwestern part of North Carolina on the Board of Transportation. I have a fellow colleague here with me tonight that I would also like to introduce the Secretary of Transportation Lyndo Tippet. Please join me.

We would like to welcome all of you here. I have seen many of you at the workshops that we've held up through the last week. We've received many comments from this project and appreciate all of your input. It's important that we hear from you. We want your comments. We need to hear them because this is your Department of Transportation.

Let me ask each of you to have the courage to speak honestly and frankly. And also, to have the discipline to listen quietly with an open mind as others do the same. As always, it's a great pleasure to be here in this area. Thank you for allowing me to serve as your Board of Transportation Member.

Secretary Lyndo Tippet: Thank you Sam and thank all of you for coming out tonight. I know that you came here to be listened to and not to listen to me but I wanted to come and hear the voice of each of you so that's why I'm here and we appreciate your interest in this project as well as those others who are out to stay. On behalf of Governor Easley, I want you to know the Department of Transportation is involved in each community project and we try to listen to those who are interested in the project. That's what this process is all about. Now again, thank you all for coming. I'll be here if any of you have any questions, I'll be happy to respond individually while the meeting is going on. Thanks again.

Moderator: Thank you Mr. Secretary.

Let me continue to introduce some other people who are with us this evening. We have Deputy Secretary Dan Devane. We have our Highway Administrator, Mr. Len Sanderson. We have Deputy Highway Administrator Len Hill. Our Director of Public Information Sherry Creech Johnson. We have our Division Engineer, Carl McCann who is out of north Wilkesboro. Let's

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see, out of Raleigh office, with our Project Development and Environmental Analysis, we have Ms. Gail Grimes, Ms. Teresa Hart, and Ms. Missy Dickens. Missy is in the back there. From Roadway Design, we have Mr. Greg Brew. We have our Architectural Historian, Ms. Barbara Church. We have Mr. Jeff Lackey who is with our Roadside Environmental. Then with Parson Brickerhoff, we have Mr. John Page, Mr. Reggie Scales and Mr. Dean Hatfield.

Does everyone have a handout? If you don't, we have plenty more and we'll certainly get you one if you don't. If you would, turn with me where there is information that I need to go through with you on this. We'll try to get the required things out of the way first and do it as quickly as we can. Okay, we've got several over there.

Okay, let's start going through this. The primary purpose of the project is to improve traffic flow and the level of service on US 321 in the area from Blackberry Road to US 221 and to reduce accidents on a portion of US 321 within Blowing Rock. Without road improvements our forecasted traffic for the year 2025 will exceed the road's capacity and create an undesirable level of service. Also higher accidents rates will continue without any improvements. This portion is also a part of the North Carolina Intrastate System that was enacted by the General Assembly in 1989. That is General Statue 136-179.

Now tonight's hearing is one of the steps for allowing you the general public to be a part of this process; the planning process and the selection process. We are seeking your views. We've done this for a while now. We've had several workshops last week where we saw many of you here at those workshops along with lots of other people. So we're seeking your comments tonight for the section of the location for this project. Showing preliminary designs is something we started doing recently because actually the environmental agencies wanted to see more of the designs earlier in the process. So, if we have them we feel like we need to show them to you. However, this is a corridor hearing and we're still trying to select a location.

Now we encourage you to participate in this process because that's our purpose for being here. You can do that in a couple of ways. You can speak here tonight. You can submit written comments for the next 30 days regarding this project. The back of the handout has a comment sheet you can use. You can use any other form of letter that you want and it has my name and address that's on there. The written comments will be considered the same as if they are spoken here tonight. Of course, you can do both.

Now there are a couple of ground rules that we like to go by that make the hearings go a little better. First of all, this is a public hearing and it's not a public debate. I'm not here and none of us is here to argue with you. I can't out debate any one of you, much less all of you and I'm not going to try. It would just prolong the proceedings and we won't get very far doing that. So we want to hear your comments. We'll try to answer what questions we can. If we can't answer them, we'll try to get you one. But, we still don't want it to be a debate. Also, we ask that you don't debate among yourselves. As Mr. Irby said, we would like for this to be conducted civilly. I know not everyone agrees in here and that's perfectly fine. That's part of this country, we don't have to agree with everybody, but we do want you to allow everyone the same courtesy to speak as you would like to have if you were speaking. So we're not asking for much on that, so if we do that, things will go fairly well and we shouldn't have any problems here.

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Now once we get through the hearing tonight, once we get the comments tonight's, the written comments, we'll put those together. We will have a post-hearing meeting a few weeks after the comment period ends and we'll go over each and every comment. We'll have them all assimilated and we'll go over those. We'll address those and try to incorporate what we can into the project as part of this meeting.

Now after that is the corridor selection process and this is getting to be a fairly complicated process. First of all, it's not a unilateral decision by NCDOT. It's made in conjunction with a number of environmental agencies as well. So this team, and it's comprised of NCDOT and where applicable, the Federal Highway Administration, US Army Corps of Engineers, US Fish and Wildlife Service, the EPA, the North Carolina Division of Water Quality, the Wildlife Resource Commission, the State Historic Preservation Office, and others as appropriate. All of these have a say in the selection just as much as we do. Once they meet and determine what is called the Least Environmental Damaging Practical Alternative, LEDPA for short. That will be presented to the Secretary as a recommendation and the Secretary will have the responsibility to make the selection official and then that will be post on the website and will be sent out in a newsletter as well.

Now at this time, the Department has not determined the funding for this project. The Environmental Document was done according to Federal Standards to allow us to do Federal Funding if we so desire. Also, we still may end up doing the State Funding because that has not been determined at this time.

There is other stuff there. We have got a long night. I'll let you read that. I won't go through ever detail in terms of the project need. That's also in the document.

The Project Description is some of the same. I'll go through the maps on some of that but we have five build alternatives along with the no-build alternative as part of the hearing tonight.

Our tentative schedule right now is to begin right of way acquisition in the year 2008 and construction in 2010. Of course, schedules are subject to change depending upon availability of funds and the other external things that may happen.

The next page is just a map showing the five alternatives, like this map here. We have here and we'll show you on the screen in a few minutes as I go through these.

The pages after that are just a summary of comparisons of the alternatives. That gives you details on all of them from designs speed all the way through median width, cost, traffic service, environmental impacts, human impacts, and various other things and everything we can think of to make a nice little able to show you the comparison. All the alternatives are looked at and the estimates are made exactly the same to try to get an accurate comparison of them.

Then after that, we have what we call typical sections. Typical sections would be this slice if you take a little slice out of the roadway and turn it up on its end and look at it sideways, that is sort of what it would look like. But it gives you the general widths for different sections of the roadway. You'll see some of them were four lanes ... all of them were four lanes with twelve foot lanes. Some of the places are a four-foot painted median and the other places we're looking

at a raised median with landscaping but those give you various widths and how they look including a possible tunnel. Again, two twelve foot lanes going in each direction with shoulders and you can see the details of that there.

The next sheet is a comment sheet on which you may write comments to me. You can leave them here with me tonight. You can mail them within the next 30 days.

I'm going to try to show you this map; the map that's in your handout which shows the alternatives and try to project it up on the screen where it's a little bit larger so that you can see that. Basically, there are five build alternatives. There's a widening alternative which widens the existing US 321 Bypass. There is Alternative 1A and 1B and Alternative 4A and 4B.

Now the widening alternative, in fact, all the alternatives start at the Blackberry Road. The widening alternative for the most part follows the existing 321 Bypass all the way up to near the shops there at Possum Hollow Road south on the parkway there at Possum Hollow Road. So the alignment of that is pretty much along the existing roadway. There are a couple of minor curves that will be straightened out. The Alternatives 1A and 1B are sort of an inner new location bypass. Again, they start down near the Blackberry Road and they follow this alignment which will go through the Green Hill area. They too come out on Possum Hollow Road near the parkway south there. Then Alternatives 4A and 4B, and I'll explain a little bit more detail of these when I go to the map. But again, this starts near the Blackberry Road. They go further east and they continue in a northerly direction and cross under the Blue Ridge Parkway with a tunnel between Green Hill Road and the Thunder Hill Overlook. They continue on out to Aho Road where it intersects with existing 321.

Now I'm going to need to show on these design maps. Logistics wise, they are large maps in a small room so we've got to spread out a little bit. I know you can't see all the details but I'll try to go through them somewhat and fairly briefly. Well, let me go through the color scheme. The Dark Green you can see it in some areas, is existing right of way or right of we already own. The Light Green areas are proposed right of way; the right of way we would intend to buy as part of the project. The Yellow represents new pavement. Gray in some areas is existing payment. Red represents a structure and in that case a bridge and along some of the areas of curb and gutter and sidewalks as well which you can't see which they would be over there at that one. Brown is building. Blue is water. I think that covers most of it. Purple/Pink is power line or utility easements or things like that. The widening alternative starts over here. Again, it starts at Blackberry Road and heads north along the existing US 321 Bypass. You can see some of the cuts and fields through there. We'd be widening from two lanes to four lanes there. This particular area is just four lanes with no median. We'd relocate this road here, the intersection, to make that a little more safe. Again, it follows the existing on through the Green Park Inn there. It would widen away from that on the side opposite of the end and put a landscaped median in front of that. Then we would go back to four lanes and come on around to this area here. We're at Ransom Street and then we would pick up the four lanes with a median in the middle all the way through here and that's proposed to be a landscaped median. There's some computer renderings out in the lobby that you can look at to show what we propose there. It continues on to Possum Hollow Road there with stops on the Parkway at that intersection there. Here we have the Bypass Alternative 1A and 1B. They are very similar. I'll try to show you the differences but anyway, they start at Blackberry Road. It is a four lane roadway section separated by four foot

189 painted median. They're both the same on this sheet. We straighten out the curb right here a
 190 little bit. We come to here and this is where they differ. The 1A follows the existing roadway
 191 through here. This is up to the existing 321 Business. The 1B straightens that S curve out right
 192 there and where this starts off here on new location on a short bridge and then comes around on
 193 new location down through the Green Hill area. It briefly crosses under Green Hill Road. This is
 194 on a longer structure and straightens out this curve here. It's a little further south. From here out
 195 they're basically the same. We have a bridge here over Wendolyn Drive in both locations. Both
 196 of them here, Goforth Road will go over the proposed bypass and then they both end at the
 197 existing 321 there at Possom Hollow Road.

198
 199 Now 4A and 4B they start here. They're similar also but both of them start at Blackberry Road
 200 for an even shortly after going north heads off on new location. Here you see we have a number
 201 of structures. This large Green represents the cuts in the field area here where we'll have to take
 202 down hill sides and fill in holes and things like that. It continues north to the Blue Ridge
 203 Parkway. There we are proposing twin tunnels to go over the parkway under this alternative and
 204 that's between Green Hill Road and the Thunderhill Overlook. The tunnel proposed is about
 205 1400 feet long. This again continues sort of north on new location. That bridge there is over a
 206 bunch of streams. That comes out on your Aho Road on existing 321. Before B is very similar
 207 except it has a larger number of structures on it. Several additional structures which cost a
 208 little bit more but it limits or reduces the earth work or the cuts in the fields on the project. That's
 209 the reason we show this alternative. It's a little bit different. The location is very much the same,
 210 it's just got more bridges on it as opposed to cutting out or filling in the terrain there.

211
 212 Now I have a little more information that I need to go through and try to wrap this up. On all of
 213 these projects, these are very difficult, long and very complicated process. But they are done
 214 under certain standards. Not all are set up at DOT. First off, engineering requirements, there are
 215 various laws that affect what we do and how we design things. First of all, it's the General Statute
 216 89C which is the North Carolina Engineering and Land Survey Act which basically is a licensing
 217 board for professional engineers. They have certain requirements that engineers have to adhere
 218 to including ethics, rules and various specifics. There are about 8 or 10 pages worth of laws that
 219 we have to go by. So the professional engineer or licensed engineer is not going to risk his career
 220 and not going to risk his livelihood, his home, his cat, his dog and everything else to arbitrarily
 221 design something. So the design is by certain standards and they are covered by specific laws.
 222 Also the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials, AASHTO, is a
 223 national set of design standards and every state in the country follows those.

224
 225 The NEPA, National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 requires that agencies take actions to
 226 avoid, minimize, rectify, reduce or eliminate or compensate for any environmental damage
 227 associated with a project. All these things have to be looked at and there are a number of laws
 228 that come up that are associated with that. *Okay, it's not in its right place.* That's not... Okay
 229 here we are. Federal Highway Administration 23CFR771 also talks avoid, minimize and
 230 mitigate environmental damages. In that tier, we have to avoid wherever possible. We have to
 231 minimize wherever possible. We have to mitigate wherever possible. They're very specific
 232 about that.

233
 234 Also under that is the Clean Water Act. The US Fish and Wildlife has a mitigation policy
 235 executive orders on flood planes and roadways. In particular in an area in this part of the state

236 there are specific ways that you have to treat trout water. That's why sometimes you have to
 237 bridge instead of using culverts and things like that. There's a number of laws that they require
 238 that we look at on that.

239
 240 We also have Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act that covers the way we have
 241 to look at historic properties. In section 4F of the US DOT act looks at the way to purchase those
 242 properties or to take those properties. There is also the noise walls. 23 of Federal Regulations
 243 772 and Endangered Species Act there are some endangered species in this area that we have to
 244 look at and you have to avoid those.

245
 246 There are also a number of other factors that are looked at in our environmental documents.
 247 Those include under natural resources, we have to look at wetlands, we have to look at flood
 248 planes, plant communities and a number of other stream crossings and most of those are in your
 249 handout as to the values of those.

250
 251 We have to look at socioeconomic criteria. This is estimated relocations, the number of affected
 252 community facilities, consistency with land use plans, and that is all covered in the document.
 253 Cultural resources, the number of potentially affected historical sites, the potentially affected
 254 archeological sites, parks and recreational facilities. Under engineering factors, you have to look
 255 at traffic, traffic service, the length of the project, the topography, drainage, the cost,
 256 interchanges, there aren't any on these projects but there would be any number of grade
 257 separations. There are some of those. I also wanted to take into account the citizens comments,
 258 local officials comments. All of these are put together in a matrix and looked across the board.
 259 There is no one factor that rules. They all have to put together and come out with, as we said
 260 before, the least environmentally damaging practical alternative.

261
 262 Okay, now I need to cover some right of way procedures. Once a route is selected and approved,
 263 the design is completed, the proposed right of way will be staked on the ground. The affected
 264 property owners will be contacted by a right of way agent. This agent will ask you about your
 265 property. He will ask you questions and try to gather all the information he can about it so that
 266 he can make an appraisal of the property based on its highest and best use and based on the
 267 information that he gathers. So it would be to you advantage to supply as much information as
 268 possible. The agent will inform you of your rights while he is doing this. The plans will be
 269 explained to you. The owner will be told exactly how he is affected. Then the Department will
 270 either using our professional appraisers or hiring local fee appraisers will make an appraisal of
 271 that property. The compensation is the highest and best use at the current market value of the
 272 property at the time of the appraisal. It's not tax value, but market value that is done very
 273 similarly to how a real estate agent would do in determining the value of your property. During
 274 this process, the Department must treat all owners and tenants equally, must fully explain owners'
 275 rights to you, must pay just compensation in exchange for property rights, must furnish relocation
 276 advisory assistance if needed, must initiate any legal action if a settlement cannot be reached. If
 277 you are relocated as a part of the project, that is if your home or business is being bought, the
 278 agent will also offer you assistance and explain the procedures for that. They will help you to
 279 locate comparable housing, that's housing very similar to what you are in now as closely as
 280 possible as to what you have. He will provide you with moving aid. There are also additional
 281 payments possible for such things as closing costs, increases in mortgage rates, or additional
 282 value of comparable housing.

Okay, with that now we're going to now open the floor up to you for your comments. We have a large number of speakers signed up. There are over sixty people. That's fine. I've been asked to ask you to try to limit your comments to 2 minutes if you will. We're trying to get out of here.

Unidentified Person: What about the 5 minutes?

Moderator: We're asking you to limit the comments as much as you can to 2 minutes if possible. This is going to be a long night. The reason is not to limit your talking, once we go through the list you can come back up as much as you want. The reason is because there are people who have to get up in the morning and go to work. There are people with small children. There are people who need to leave a little earlier.

Unidentified Female: *(Shouting)* This is our workshop. *(Inaudible)*...

Moderator: We're just trying to provide an opportunity for everybody to have the opportunity to speak.

Unidentified Female: Why did you tell us 5 minutes? There are those of us who have prepared something and then you come here and tell us we only have 2 minutes? Why is that?

Moderator: Well, the reason is because we have so many speakers here. We're talking about 5 or 6 hours.

Unidentified Male: Where do you live?

Moderator: Okay, let's get on with it. You'll have your opportunity. We just want to get through the list to begin with.

(Inaudible)

Moderator: I would prefer that but what I cover is required by law. We do have a traffic signal back there that will be green and yellow is a minute and a half, and red is a couple of minutes. It just sort of reminds you. If you would please, come up and use one of our microphones first of all to make sure that everyone can hear you. This is a formal hearing it is being recorded. We want to make sure that the tape recorder can hear you as well.

I'll give a couple of names. Our first gentleman is James Snow, followed by Sue Glenn.

James Snow: Secretary Tippet, Commissioner Irby and distinguished guests and concerned citizens, my name is James Snow. I'm a resident of High Point and also we have a second home here in Blowing Rock. I was raised in the northwest. I have relatives all up in these hills. I speak to the concerns of Blowing Rock and also for northwest North Carolina.

Robert Morgan the author in "Gap Creek" writes about building roads in the mountains. In the Hinterlands he gets at this more specifically through the character David who

discussing the building the turnpike he says, "Ain't nothing on a mountain straight or regular. That's one thing I know about *(Inaudible)* off. You draw a straight line or a smooth curve right through the roughness and role of an edge. You cut the road out where it needs to be not where it is easiest to make. You make the lay of the land fit your ideal and purpose. But you also make your ideal fit the place that you are working on." So what is the idea here? What is the purpose? It seems to me and a lot of other folks here tonight the idea is to have a really decent expedient road for the people of northwest North Carolina and for people to get into northwest North Carolina. All our urban areas have gotten expressways and parkways and inner and outer beltways. Northwest North Carolina has struggled to get one decent complete four-lane road in to it.

Years ago when I visited the coast of our great state, I admired how it seemed everyone in North Carolina wanted to be at our beaches for Memorial Day to Labor Day but no one in Raleigh seemed inclined to help build the roads to get them there. Well today if you had gone to Wilmington on I-40 or you've seen the bridges of 17 and 70 at New Bern or the latest marvel the Virginia Dare Bridge at Manteo, this will attest to the fact that our roads to the coast have vastly improved. Then there's poor little 321 and 421. This past Saturday and Sunday, I witnessed a frustrated parent who had recently dropped off ASU students queued for the stoplights in Blowing Rock. As the crept along, I wondered how they would feel about three years of construction delays in the end only to get one extra lane for two or three extra stoplights. I also considered the new developments in Ashe, Avery, Watauga. The workers in those counties that want to get the better paying jobs in Lenoir and Hickory. Our aging population who will continue to retire here and want to get the health care off the mountain in places like Charlotte. If you simply widen the existing road, in the years the joke will be, "Have you seen the new Blowing Rock Bypass? Well, neither have I." If you truly give us a bypass that we need, people will say like about the Lingo Fire Duck, "Have you seen the new Blowing Rock Bypass? It's a marvel and a wonder."

I have faith to believe that there exists the engineering intellect and the public result to build a truly great road around Blowing Rock that will accomplish the transportation objectives, protect property values and protect the environment and protect the views shed. I'm not sure however that we have seen that road and any of the propositions put forth.

There are those here tonight that may speak more eloquently on issues of the heart, more precisely on engineering issues or more adroitly on legal issues. But I offer you, the decision makers, the following, you have a choice to have epithets hurled at you or epitaphs written about you. Will they write about you, "They widened the road that no one liked?" Or will they write about you, "They made the land fit their purpose and their purpose fit the place?" Thank you.

Moderator: Thank you Mr. Snow. Sue Glenn. And Maurice Lund after that.

Sue Glenn: I'm Sue Glenn and tonight I'm speaking only for myself with no personal positive benefits from any of the alternative choices. I would personally be affected negatively by all the alternatives. If anyone here sees something positive that I'm missing, please share that with me and I'll feel better.

In reviewing the EIS document and in speaking with the engineers, I was particularly alarmed to see the information presented that statistically the 2.3 miles urban section of US 321 through Blowing Rock showed higher accident rates than the state comparative rate. Since my personal experience, one minor fender bender in 30 years has not shown the road to be particularly dangerous, I went to our police station to take a look at the police accident reports to see what was really going on. I only had time to review the hundreds of records for the past couple of years, but I believe the patterns are probably similar for earlier periods as well. On this map the blue dots represents personal property injury or damage and the red dots represent injury cases and accidents for the period 2001 to 2002. What I found was that in terms of property damage, you're far likely to be involved in a property damage accident at the post office, at the shopping center or at one of our parking areas than you are on Highway 321. The types of accidents that are now happening with very few exceptions are very minor fender benders with relatively little damage and few injuries. Clusters of accidents happen around the intersections where people are failing to pay proper attention to what is going on around them or at entrances at popular restaurants along Alley Boulevard. Icing conditions, snowy slippery roads blowing snow and fog and rain contribute to some accidents too but fewer than we might expect. People are traveling slowly enough that injuries and property damage are typically very minor. Of course their slow travel helps DOT add another bad statistic to the report for the so called level of service or LOS rating. Slow speed alone has probably protected many drivers from more severe injuries.

When I talked with the engineers, they explained that they were not showing turn lanes in their design because with four lanes it wouldn't be needed. I note that with many of the more expensive accidents that occurred were at the shops on the parkway intersection that does not have a turn lane into Possum Hollow Road. Since there design showed a planted median, access by north bound traffic to any businesses that survived the construction period on the west side of Alley Boulevard would be accomplished by making a U-turn into oncoming traffic at the next available intersection. With the planted median to reduce visibility that certainly didn't seem like a safer alternative plan to me. There would only be a couple of businesses on the east side of Alley Boulevard left to access. The engineers admitted that many of the things that could be done right now to make the present roadway more functional and safer were not high on DOT's priority list even though they could be done without any of the hoopla that we are now seeing. Yes slightly straightening out the curves between Darwood Circle and Pinnacle Avenue and providing a left turn lane would make that stretch safer. Yes providing a turn lane into Possum Hollow Road would make that intersection safer. Yes even making Alley Boulevard three lanes with a turn lane in the middle would make it safer. Though these improvements alone would make not allow increased traffic loads projected by 2025 to be handled with the acceptable LOS flow rating. Yes these things would probably need to be done even if any of the other road alternatives were selected. Although improved safety was one of the first features targeted by DOT when this project was initially proposed, I note that many of the improved safety features that showed up in earlier designs have not been offered in the latest ones. One of our most dangerous and catastrophic accident areas is the first one lane section just below the Blackberry Road intersection. Though the middle section plans only went to the south end of Falcon Crest Subdivision, this stretch of road does not appear to be on present plans either perhaps because DOT does not want to talk about it just now. Curves here are so tight that truckloads can't recover their equilibrium before the trucks hit the next opposing curves. Roads shift and truckers loose control. The proposed plan also refuses the acknowledge the affects of weather conditions

and road safety. The engineers freely state that they did not take fog into account but looked quite frank when I pointed out that because of the elevation change in the topography, their transitional weather affects from the first four lane area up. Where the snow and freezing road conditions often begin, a great surprise to unprepared motorists coming up the mountain and expecting to maintain their rate of speed and LOS.

It was particularly chilling for me to understand the DOT typically does not take minimal safety improvements until there has been a really terrible accident. Though I had reported an accident at the curve markers by my condominium it was not until a young man was killed there that curve markers and guard rails were installed less than a month after his death. Though the engineers working on this project know what to do their assigned is very narrow and constrained by other factors. We cannot count on DOT to make the road as safe as possible by themselves. After many questions it also became clear that the pictures that we were seeing were not truly a promise of what will come. The proposal to put the utility wires underground as part of the construction process for the widening alternative is merely a proposal not a promise. Putting the wires underground would substantially increase the construction time, add to the cost of the project and complicate matters and it is exactly that sort of thing that might be deleted from the final plan. It is interesting that the vegetation seems to automatically grow better to greater maturity along the widening route than along the cuts and fills of the bypass alternatives. We know that from local experience on (Inaudible) that beautiful expensive roads will not be built by road builders unless, kicking and streaming, they are forced to build them that way. Then these roads become the crown jewels of those road builders career accomplishments and visitors attractions in their own right. Like the Glenwood Canyon Road in Colorado which we just want the best safest more beautiful road that can be built.

Moderator: Thank you Ms. Glenn. Maurice Lund or Lind. And then Paul Petersen after that.

Maurice Lind: I'm Maury Lind. I live at 1250 ... can you hear me better ... a little bit better? I'm Maury Lind and I live at 1258 Green Hill Road. 1A and 1B goes through my living room. Obviously, I don't want that.

I appeal to your love of nature in terms of 4A and 4B. Have you ever looked out across Blackberry Gorge and see the sunrise is in the east? My wife and I do every morning. It is beautiful. I refer you to an article by Lisa Field in the last Blue Ridge Magazine. I quote, *"We need to get outdoors to see what the world is all about while the sweet wild place is yet able to be saved."* And she goes on and I quote, *"Many Americans viewed 911 as a wake-up call. But calls have been coming for years not to further secure our safety smothered selves but to go out and rescue the real troubled earth that needs our help. See what the world's all about. We don't have to divide Blackberry Gorge with a ribbon of concrete."* Thank you.

Moderator: Paul Peterson. And the Cobb Milner after that.

Paul Peterson: For the last six years I've served on a small group over on the Green Hill side of town. If you look at all the proposed bypasses other than the widening, they come through our area. We have formed a small group called the Neighborhood Coalition to look out of our area. Effectively, I'm going to tell you the same thing that Maury just told you.

I want to start with or make two points just as strongly as I can. First of all, I think the safety of our highway, if you listened to Sue Glenn, is a very minor problem. It's not. I also looked at the records at the Town Hall or at the Police Station. The statistics are not there. If you talk to the Blowing Rock Rescue Squad the statistics are there. There have been a lot of serious accidents and a lot of deaths on the highway in and just south of Blowing Rock. Safety is a very serious concern. Second, we don't need either of the proposed alternate bypasses either 1 or 4. Either one would take a great deal of private property. Both have a devastating impact on the environment and both would have a devastating impact on neighborhoods on the east side of Blowing Rock.

Some general remarks: DOT has done an excellent job of providing the DEIS along with Parsons Brickerhoff. You've heard some bad comments about them. It's a very comprehensive document. Tonight we've got the opportunity for both sides to speak out here. That's at least better than our Town Council gave us before they passed their last resolution. They listened to one side and did not even bother to hear from the other side. We thanked them for the opportunity to be heard tonight.

I'm sure you've all confirmed that the town is essentially split on the subject of the highway. Those in favor of a new bypass claim the majority; those oppose to a new bypass also claim a majority. We're probably down the middle. You've heard from few businessmen. Even the Merchant's Association have divided down the middle and can't arrive at a consensus.

If we continue down the present course we'll wind up in court. Both sides will hire a gaggle of lawyers and experts and we'll let them argue for a while. In the end the lawyers and the experts will be richer and the rest of us will be a whole lot poorer. We'll still be equally divided. Then some judge will make the decision and the only good thing that you could say about that is that the judge will have at least had the common decency to look at both sides of the argument more than we've got here.

I only ask DOT and the other officials, when you make your decision to at least look at all the options and then provide us the citizens of Blowing Rock with a comprehensive analysis of how you arrive at your decision. Opposition from the Federal Parks Service along the Parkway from the Federal Highway Administration or from North Carolina Department of Transportation, tell us about your environmental considerations, the impact on private property and financial considerations. Tell us about the destruction of Blowing Rock neighborhoods, overall lost in Blowing Rock property values and loss of the tax base in Blowing Rock. Or maybe you would just be made of citizens sentiments made on safety considerations. At least a comprehensive analysis will make it easier to understand your reasoning and it may make it easier for us to accept a decision and to avoid lengthy and expensive lawsuits following receipt of the decision.

Let me end where we started. We don't need another bypass. We do need a safer highway. We need it as soon as possible. I support the widening of the existing highway. Thank you.

Moderator: Thank you Mr. Peterson. Cobb Milner. And then David Baskin.

Cobb Milner: I'm speaking for the group that was studying the environmental impact. Let's talk pollution. We know the following: We know that motor vehicle exhaust is one of the major causes of pollution. Stop and go traffic creates the highest level of vehicle pollution. Pollution can cause people to die immaturesly from asthma, breathing disorders or heart failure. We know that our young and our elderly are the most susceptible to the this pollution. Widening 321, Valley Boulevard would increase stop and go traffic 200 to 250% as the number of the lights would increase from three to six. We know that in the summer time when pollutants are at their highest levels, those who are most susceptible are exposed are children and our seniors. This is the time of year when Blowing Rock is most densely populated. We know that the widening of 321 possibly has an increased cost. The total true cost of widening 321 is one that the population of Blowing Rock would have to endure for decades. The cost is more than dollars. It's about an environment that continues to deteriorate and a population, its young and its old, is left with debilitating diseases that cut through ways. They take away the quality of life and they are extremely costly to the individual and society in general.

In closing, I would wish that we could come up with some additional alternatives, one that might be feasible for example would be to split off some place down around Blackberry Road with a two-lane, not dual, two-lane high speed bypass with no intersections that takes off south of Blowing Rock and crosses under the Parkway at this long bridge and ends in Aho. Twenty years down the road, if a dual-lane is plausible, and I use that word so sanely, it can be added to the existing bypass also crossing under the Parkway at a (inaudible) bridge maybe 500 feet away from the other lane.

Finally, I don't give a darn about the people traveling on the Blue Ridge Parkway who for ten or fifty feet or maybe even twenty seconds have to look at four lane highway crosses down at the Parkway, when the only alternative is that I and the entire citizenship of Blowing Rock now and for decades to come have to spend the rest of our lives looking at a five lane asphalt abortion right through our beloved village. Thank you.

Moderator: David Baskin. Then Shawn Postlewait.

David Baskin: That's going to be hard to follow Cobb. My name is David Baskin and I'm speaking to you on behalf of myself and my wife Jean, the property manager for Louise Curusal. My wife and I and Mrs. Curusal own joined properties which have approximately 465 front peeks on US 321 just north of Cornish Road on Valley Boulevard. We three property owners can't imagine during the chaos of construction, if it is decided to widen the existing US 321 corridor. Our business will suffer irreparable financial damage during construction and the difficulty of ingress and egress to our business will be ongoing forever due to the median strip proposed making it more difficult to enter our properties by perspective customers and this difficulty will tend to eliminate prospective customers who may just want to browse and even worse regular customers who now find it too difficult to come and see us. I do not have fancy surveys or figures to back up my claim, just good business sense learned over several decades for doing business and listening to what people are trying to tell me.

I also am a keen observer of things going on around me. In watching construction in general, in most every case I observed, it always takes longer than planned, cost more than

planned, disrupts more than planned. It seems best to us to have a true bypass to handle the traffic that is going through not to Blowing Rock. I made the comment to a Parsons Brickerhoff manager at the (Inaudible) presentation on 8/19 that a toll road should be considered if cost is a true factor. I asked him if that had been considered. He indicated that he did not know the answer to my question however, he went on to say that there had to be motivation for people to use a toll road. It would seem to us to be motivation enough to do so, but if more motivation is needed it could easily be accomplished by something so simple as the Blowing Rock Police Department enforcing the current speed limit on the present 321 course. We are not engineers nor professional road builders nor politicians but good knowledgeable business owners and citizens that believes there is a better way to get traffic by Blowing Rock than to disrupt the town and businesses and citizens who live here.

Moderator: Shawn Postlethwait. Then Susan Owen.

Shawn Postlethwait: First I want to say that in theory, the government is supposed to be about, by and for the people. I've heard state representatives at the various workshops talk about building consistency. But this particular instance, up until this point in time, I see a government of special interest by a disconnected bureaucrats who are not for or (Inaudible) about other people and the impact it bears. With the proposed alternative of routes, the government has been effective at dividing communities against communities and neighbors against neighbors.

The purpose of the project is said to be to reduce accidents within Blowing Rock and to handle the expected increase and flow of the traffic. What isn't said is that the most serious accidents have occurred on a four-lane section of 321 not the two-lane portion that most (Inaudible) on. The state's DEIS, Draft Environmental Impact Statement notes the concern that even with a four-lane widening of 321, more capacity may be needed to handle projected future traffic growths. If that is so, then why not build the bypass now around Blackberry and Blowing Rock and allow or avoid, I should say, to build a bypass void of stoplights that will induce just on 321 and allow the nearly seven out of eight vehicles which on a yearly basis never stop in Blowing Rock or the surrounding communities. Allow the users who are just passing through (Inaudible) travel. Build a bypass now while the cost is cheaper. Make it as environmentally friendly as possible and benefit the communities, the truckers and the bulk of travelers who pass through this area. This is not a community of "in your face" people. Many moved here to get away from that mentality. I think the state is trying to capitalize on that notion of passivity. But now, you and I are confronted by such a mentality and I suggest you fight this (Inaudible) with legal actions, emails, phone calls, and if need be public rallies in hopes to generate both television and newspaper coverage. The surrounding areas and the faction within Blowing Rock must unite if we are going to be successful. Those who want this widening have vested financial or political interest. Find out who they are. If need be, put their names in the paper. If they have an open (Inaudible) about doing what is proposed, you should have no (Inaudible) about exposing those who are behind this attempt to permanently change the character of this area. This is a jewel in this rural metropolis, an area of small towns and communities. So, fight for it of, for and by the people.

Moderator: Thank you sir. Susan Owen. And then, Theda Holder Moore.

Susan Owen: Hi, my name is Susan Owen. I have lived in Boone for 25 years. I'm a

concerned citizen of Watauga County.

I'm not here to make anybody mad. I just want to have the courage and discipline to speak frankly as Mr. Goode has asked us to. Someone said, "Susan you better put on your bullet proof vest because you are going to make some people mad." When someone else said that I could use this document instead because it might not stop a bullet but it would surely slow it down. I think that this is an incredible document that DOT has prepared and I think they did an outstanding job above and beyond what could have been done. I believe they're doing everything they can to give us the alternatives to decide on.

I left town yesterday to take a week long vacation. I'm back in town tonight for this meeting. That's how much it means to me. After this meeting, I'm going back out of town to finish my vacation.

After going over all the options very carefully, I believe that widening the already existing bypass is the only alternative. I believe that widening would vastly improve the look of the bypass that is already in Blowing Rock. Have you seen the renderings of what the road in front of the Green Park Inn would look like? It's beautiful. I mean it is beautiful. People coming up the mountain will approach Blowing Rock and say, "Wow this is lovely." The medians, the landscaping, the walkways and the power lines underground. Then on down Valley Boulevard towards Sunset Drive it is still beautiful. Landscaping, walkways, power lines underground. You know if Boone would only put their power lines underground. I came to Boone as a student in 1977 and I never left. I feel very privileged and very lucky to be able to live in these beautiful mountains. I also feel that it is a blessing to be able to raise my children in these mountains. As a college student, friends and I used to go up to the Thunderhill Overlook across the parkway and fly kites. It was such a beautiful place. Even now, 25 years later, I take my children up there. We had a wonderful Mother's Day picnic there just this year, all of us. It is truly one of the most beautiful overlooks on the Parkway, on both sides of the Parkway. Even people have chosen to get married there because it is so beautiful. It is indeed hallowed ground.

I hope you all have seen and read what would happen with the alternative for the tunnel. Twenty stream crossings, I just read that tonight. Huge retaining walls. Some up to 85 feet tall. Do y'all know how big 85 feet is? That's huge. Deep gap walls, you know the wall that are retaining walls in Deep Gap Mountain. They're big. They're what, 40 feet? Okay, I'm going to wrap it up. They're about 40 feet. 85 feet is over eight stories tall. I can't think of anything in Watauga County to compare it to. Trees will hide it. Do you know how long it will take a tree to grow that tall? Almost 100 years. The cuts to be made are tremendous. That part of the map right there. See all that green. Those are cuts. They're going to have to keep that from eroding if it ever rains or keep stuff growing on it if it doesn't rain. How do they keep that from eroding?

Last thing, an the tunnel alternative will need a command center. Did y'all know that? Did you know that includes a helicopter pad, a 24-hour ambulance and EMT office dispatch, a huge parking lot. Who's going to want to get married there? So, I agree that it would be a travesty to gouge and starve these mountains, not to mention all that money just to bypass a bypass. Thank you.

Moderator: Theda Holder Moore and then Dan Coffey.

Theda Holder Moore: Good evening. My name is Theda Holder Moore. I could talk for a long time about the environmental impact of the streams, the wildlife, etc. but I've chosen instead to give some facts that I feel appropriate for my case.

The original Green Hill Road passed in front of our house and was always a gravel road. Rights pertaining to the road were obtained from my grandparents Will and Cora Estes Craig who owned many acres of land. In 1935, the Blue Ridge Parkway was received and again the Craig property was hit hard and many acres lost or taken. Due to the Parkway, the Green Hill Road was then relocated again and again more property was taken from the Craig's. I am one of their grandchildren.

After an automobile accident in October of 1990 when both of our parents died together my three sisters and I inherited a total of 13.98 acres of land from Roy and Lee Holder on and off Green Hill Road adjacent to the Parkway. Now of you would take or ruin what we have left. I realize that many folks have taken a point of view of letting the bypass go anywhere so long as it does not affect me. I now tell you that we also have the "me" attitude. We're opposed to alternatives 4A and B. Folks our family has given enough.

Moderator: Dan Coffey. Dan Coffey and then Bob & Nancy Bumbaugh after that.

Dan Coffey: My name is Bob Coffey and I am the owner together with my family of the Thunderhill Farm.

Most of the road in bypass 4 goes through our farm on the north side of the Parkway in which the road on the other side of the Parkway goes through. We've been there as a family since the forties and my father bought the property. We've enjoyed it. We bought it because of the peace and quiet. Now we have the opportunity to have four lanes of asphalt, four lanes of traffic - cars and trucks and so forth, four lanes of exhaust fumes and so on down through the valley instead of what we have now (Inaudible) bullfrogs and birds chirping and breezes blowing through the trees and things like that. Ten thousand cars and trucks every day, according to the state, that's a lot of noise, a lot of pollution. It's not just us, of course, who are affected by this. I'm concerned with the millions of people who use the Blue Ridge Parkway. It's a beautiful place. It's a beautiful place. I'm concerned also about the taxpayers. We're aware of the fact that bypass 4 is going to cost five hundred more than one of the other alternatives, four to five hundred percent more. That's a quarter of a billion dollars. Taxpayers should be interested in that. Also the tunnel that they proposed is going to have to have staff and have to have security there probably twenty four hours a day, seven days a week. They're going to have health care there, emergency care. They're going to have to have administration and so on. I was told that by a member here that some seventy people would need to be employed up there either part-time or full-time to take care of it. It does increase the cost of the road in the years to come.

There would certainly be environmental damage by 4 far more than any of the others. The study makes that clear. I'm curious about the fact that in the study which simply says that certain agencies did not agree with the proposal that you've considered bypass 4. These names are not mentioned in this table; names like the North Carolina Division of Water Quality, US Fish and Wildlife Service, North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission, the EPA,

National Park Service. All these groups according to what I understand don't like 4 was not worth even stating. There's certainly more damage.

Another factor here which is somewhat more intangible is what you might call a risky atmosphere. You're involved with the Thunderhill Overlook looking out on the hills, it's a time for meditation. You almost feel compelled to do it. It's a sacred place almost. Everybody might not react that way but I do. I believe that running a four-lane highway through that area with all the traffic and so on is like running a semi-truck through a church or a synagogue or other place of worship. Hopefully, it works out otherwise. I hope that the time can continue where I can sit on my back porch and hear the crickets and eat potato chips and a friend might come by with all the competitor racket. Thank you.

Moderator: Thank you Mr. Coffey. Bob and Nancy. Bumbaugh. Bumbell. There not here? Roy E Gryder and then Cynthia Wadsworth.

Roy Gryder: First let me thank you the members of the DOT and the guests for the opportunity to speak to you. I appreciate your taking your time. Sir if you will be alert that the light turned red to get my attention. I don't want to break the rules.

I've lived in Blowing Rock, near Blowing Rock, all of my "none-of-your-business" years. There's been a few of them. I have in the years that I have lived here observed a situation that is not completely, is not appropriate. People have some amount of money and time or political influence have taken advantage of my people and the use of their land. This has fallen particularly in the areas of roads. It's not one of my classmates and Eva Moore might not appreciate her name noting that she is one of my classmates and high school. We have demonstrated to you how that has happened in her family.

I would like to speak to you in favor of widening 321 in its current location. There are three reasons, the first would be social. There are a group of people here tonight which I have indicated or are willing to take advantage about people and their property. And as I said, this is inappropriate. I think of them as people who are willing to sacrifice someone else's farm and save their flowerbed. I would ask those of you who have the opportunity to make the decision on this matter would consider which is of the greater significance. The loss of an only home which has been a home for two or three or perhaps more generations or loss of a part-time home.

I'll move on quickly. I'm not a very smart man but I did learn long division over at good old VRHS. My annual income would buy about that much road. Get your number 2 pencil please Wayne. But unfortunately I don't spend all of my income on road taxes. I spend some of it for myself. The State of North Carolina gets approximately that much. That's the eraser. Of course they don't spend all their money for roads either. So I don't know what you can't see the part (Inaudible) and I work for my income and I hate the number working people like myself who will have to spend their time and their hours to pay for that much additional roads (Inaudible). Thank you sir.

Moderator: Thank you Mr. Gryder. Cynthia Wadsworth and then James Craig.

753 Cynthia Wadsworth: My name is Cynthia Wadsworth. I'm a year-round resident of
 754 Blowing Rock. I live at the intersection close to Possum Hollow and Sunset Drive in a
 755 neighborhood called the Springs at Grassy Knolls.

756
 757 My family moved here in 1997 for two reasons. We were seeking peace and we
 758 were seeking to live in a building. Blowing Rock is known as a village. It is not a busing town
 759 or city. We moved here from the big city where we were constantly bombarded by noise whether
 760 it was from big trucks to airplanes flying over our house constantly. Obviously what was offered
 761 here made a large part of our decision. I represent myself and my family. I'm not involved in any
 762 group. I ask that the DOT do whatever it can to maintain Blowing Rock's status as a village.
 763 Personally, I think that the plan Alternative 1A and 1B which go the route of Green Hill Road
 764 and down Possum Hollow is simply a scary tactic. In other words, the DOT is telling us either
 765 you conform to the cheapest route or look what we could do to you. We could go right through
 766 your main neighborhoods, set your town up. We could expose these neighborhoods to the
 767 excessive noise that comes from large roads and large trucks. I can only imagine all the pets that
 768 we would awaken smashed in the road on our way to school and can you imagine the children
 769 trying to exit the school buses along this area. You can only think about the horror that is
 770 involved in those accidents. Also, if you think about the ability for to eighteen wheelers to run
 771 side by side down a four lane and especially if they have to change gears in order to slow down
 772 on some of the hills you talk about loudness. Well, it's going to be there. We would all be taking
 773 e current popular one. We're talking about, in
 774 . That to me is where the concern lies. My first
 775 the mountain by way of the current road with
 776 is the Green Park Inn. Surely people could
 777 1 of just two and a half miles until they have
 778 reached the current four lanes at the shops on the Parkway.

779
 780 (Inaudible). I am against changes for 4A and 4B the tunnel under the Parkway. I
 781 think this would disturb property which has been in some of the families for years. There is no
 782 way that there would ever be approval for the DOT to go under the Parkway or disturb that land.
 783 Plus, I think that the youth on Thunderhill. I think of that youth on Thunderhill and I think of all
 784 the marital engagements that were probably sealed there and all of the babies that were conceived
 785 there. That view is far to wonderful to disturb. I agree with the cost, we cannot have that cost to
 786 North Carolina. Do you think they would approve of that much money to be spent? No way. I
 787 mean how loud can you laugh at this? We can't even pay our teachers a decent salary. Save that
 788 money for education and teachers.

789
 790 (Inaudible)... to save money that we would have does improve our village,
 791 another easy alternative would be to put in a turn lane or third lane in this area that stretches in
 792 front of the Pizza Hut, (Inaudible) and the ABC Store. That is where the problem lies. The
 793 traffic is backed up when someone needs to make a simple turn. Again, this idea is less
 794 destructive to our village.

795
 796 I ask that each of you reflect back at the situation in Deep Gap as I watch my own
 797 parents struggle through that. The late Archie Carroll did not want his farm and his land
 798 disturbed and they went right through it. They did spare his home but if you remember, he was
 799 one of the most outspoken people about this. Again, they went right through his property. One

800 person in Deep Gap with political ties, I am told, had her home and land when she grew up
 801 designated as a historical area and that area was bypassed. But look at Deep Gap now. That's
 802 what I want to mention. There are huge warehouses on the Old 421. Everyone seeks the
 803 opportunity on the Old 421 to put the warehouses to bring in their big trucks because they could
 804 easily access the new 421. Some of us in town, yes we are protected from that happening but you
 805 never know. You never know when someone might seize that opportunity. We don't want to
 806 give them that opportunity. In Deep Gap, the Old 421 has been impacted I would say one
 807 thousand times. It is worse than it was before they built the bypass around it.

808
 809 Lastly, ... I'm sorry, you told me I had five minutes but I'm going to go a little bit
 810 longer. I scratched out as much as I could. Lastly these meetings and the ability to voice our
 811 opinions to the members of the DOT is pure bluff. That is my opinion. Earlier someone said, an
 812 engineer won't risk his home or his pets to design something poorly but yet they can sure risk our
 813 homes, our pets and they probably sleep at night. Again, I want you to look back at what
 814 happened to Deep Gap. They really had no say so and I feel that this could happen to us. Thank
 815 you.

816
 817 Moderator: Okay moving on down the line Charlie Brown is next and then James
 818 Craig.

819
 820 Charlie Brown: Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen my name is Charlie Brown. I
 821 grew up at the foot of the mountain down in Morganton. In 1975, I made 168 Hilltop Way in
 822 Blowing Rock, my home. I'm owner number 1335 on your DOT maps.

823
 824 I have the distinction of being the first full time lawyer to open an office and
 825 practice here. As a former President of the Blowing Rock Chamber of Commerce, the Planning
 826 and Zoning Board and the original Steering Committee for the High County host, I have
 827 experienced first hand the transformation of Blowing Rock from a tiny rope of an unknown spot
 828 in these mountains to a thriving resort village. The crown of the Blue Ridge. Well, here's what I
 829 think about Highway 321 improvements. No widening. I guess by now, we all recognize that
 830 further growth here is going to occur. So how do we handle it? Personally I favor carefully
 831 thought out, well planned and control groups for this future town. That's why I think Alternative
 832 4A and 4B is the best answer available to us tonight.

833
 834 For more than twenty five years, we worked hard together to give ourselves a
 835 special identity as a quiet mountain village with our own unique blend of natural beauty character
 836 and charm. It's that blend which has made us prosper. My vision is that we should keep it that
 837 way. Let's face it, we've made Blowing Rock a place where others want to come even if it is only
 838 for a visit. We're a destination. Over the years and amid some enormous political battles and
 839 huge expenditures of money, we've become a destination all of our home. Not a road side stop to
 840 buy gas and get a bite to eat while we're on our way to somewhere else.. To widen 321 to us is
 841 much like spending hours building a sand castle only to have a bunch of bullies on the beach run
 842 right through it before you finish. We're proud to be Blowing Rock. You need the land in and
 843 around the existing highway 321 for our future growth. Main Street and Sunset Drive are just
 844 about maxed out. Parking downtown is continuing to be a thorn in the side. 321 is the logical
 845 choice for future business and residential expansion. It could eventually become pedestrian
 846 oriented just as Main Street and Sunset Drive are now. It could also become the focal point of